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Teamwork and timing get road plan on ballot

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Ah, the wonders of modern technology - and some old-fashioned planning.

With the aid of both, Missouri Secretary of State Matt Blunt easily met a tight deadline Tuesday to ensure space for a \$511 million road improvement package on the Aug. 6 ballot.

Blunt fretted publicly last week that the measure, though approved by lawmakers, might not make it on the ballot because of a law that required him to notify the state's 116 election authorities individually by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Legislative leaders weren't slated to sign the bill until after 1 p.m., leaving Blunt less than four hours to get Attorney General Jay Nixon's final approval of the ballot language and a financial impact statement, and then notify the election authorities.

But Gov. Bob Holden and other officials insisted the deadline would be met. Blunt prepared last week by alerting the authorities and working with Nixon on drafts of the ballot language.

On Tuesday, Blunt's staff commandeered all 19 fax machines in the Kirkpatrick State Information Center in Jefferson City. They finished the job in one hour and nine minutes.

"We did it," Blunt said shortly after 3 p.m. "We have both a fax machine document indicating the authorities have received the notice, and more importantly, we have called each of them and verified the receipt."

The measure will ask voters to raise the state's sales tax by one-half cent and the fuel tax by 4 cents, generating \$511 million for roads, public transit and other transportation needs.

Lawmakers approved the bill during the final week of the legislative session earlier this month. They inserted language into the bill to place the measure before voters in August - not November, when a cigarette tax increase is expected to be on the ballot.

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Normally, the process of creating and certifying the official ballot title takes about 30 days. The secretary of state has to write a summary of the proposal to appear on the ballot, and the auditor must prepare a statement of the financial impact. Their work is then reviewed by the attorney general.

Given the strict deadline, however, all that was compressed into a matter of hours Tuesday at the Capitol.

House Speaker Jim Kreider, a Nixa Democrat, and Senate President Pro Tem Peter Kinder, a Cape Girardeau Republican, signed the bill at the start of a "technical session" that convened at 1 p.m.

Then, in Blunt's Capitol office, Nixon approved the ballot language and State Auditor Claire McCaskill's financial impact statement. Because Nixon had seen earlier drafts of both, Blunt said, the process lasted only a few minutes.

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The proposal

Here is the transportation tax question as it will appear on the Aug. 6 ballot:

"Shall Missouri statutes be amended to impose additional sales and use taxes of one-half cent on the dollar and an additional motor fuel tax of four cents per gallon, for highway and transportation purposes until July, 2013, unless extended by a vote of the people, and establish an inspector general within the Department of Transportation?"

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